

lament for the lonely, left behind, and forgotten by ratherbeblue

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Summary:

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When people leave Derry they forget.

So he can't leave Derry.

Ever.

lament for the lonely, left behind, and forgotten

Author's Note:

OH IT'S BIG LOVING MIKE HANLON HOURS

Mike's always known he'd be the one to stay. He's known since that summer, since they sliced open their palms, held them together underneath the late afternoon sun. He tried not to think about it then, looking into Bill's blue eyes and making a promise he knows they may never be around to fulfill if not for him.

Because he's seen what's happened, knows what will happen next. Mike Hanlon has heard all of Ben's stories, read the articles he's researched, done research of his own. He knows what happens to people when they leave Derry. He knows what's happened to Bev, then Ben, then Eddie and Richie too. While the remaining loser's try and convince themselves that they just got really busy or misplaced their addresses, Mike knows deep down what the truth is.

He's gone over and over it in his mind and he knows the truth, and the conclusion about himself he must draw from it.

When people leave Derry they forget.

So he can't leave Derry.

Ever.

They all try valiantly to make him go, they always have.

Bev had hugged him, whispered in his ear that he'd get far away from there someday. Wise beyond her years, but still so naive when it came to some things. Sometimes Mike can still feel her soft short curls against his ear.

Ben had been quiet when he left, and Mike suspected that's because he felt bad about not being as sad as he thought he should have been, but he didn't hold that against him either. He had written in the letter he left for Mike to send him a postcard from Florida.

Eddie had begged all of the losers to please, just kidnap him, take him away somewhere, Mike had just smiled at Eddie's half joking frown, tried to ignore Richie's clenched fist and downturned gaze, and told himself that he's just glad they're getting out while they still can.

Richie had hugged Mike, and in a fit of uncharacteristic vulnerability asked him to run away with him, the unshed tears in his eyes made Mike feel guilty and forlorn until he ruined it by saying they would be just like Huck Finn and Jim.

Mike cuffed him on the ear for that, but knew he had probably never really read the book anyway.

That was the last time he ever told Richie 'beep-beep.'

Bill and Stan were the worst of all, worst because they stayed, up until the very end. Summer 1995, summer after highschool graduation they wandered together around the town, around the barrens, and even back to the quarry. Maybe they were trying to capture some of their lost youth, maybe it was more of a farewell tour, Mike didn't mind either way, just happy to spend some time with them before they went where he knew he could not follow.

Stan had tried to appeal to him intellectually, which Mike loved him for, tried to tell him that with his grades, with his athletic ability, he could go to any college he wanted. It wasn't really true, but as stacks of brochures appeared in his passenger seat he didn't have the heart to deny it.

Bill offered to go with him, any school they both got into, they could pack up and move out together in his old pickup truck, they could live together in a tiny dorm and fight over which movies to watch. It was a nice story, the one's Bill told usually were, but it just wasn't something that could be true.

And though Stan and Bill were the worst, a close second came in the form of his parents. His parents who had been saving up for his college fund this whole time, his parents who told him they weren't disappointed, just wanted to make sure he was sure. It was the kindness, the near understanding, the worry they had for him that

almost had him packing up and hopping on the next train anywhere. But he couldn't.

His parents may have been worried that he was scared of leaving behind the comfort of Derry, scared to challenge himself or sacrifice something new. He knew they must think that, although they'd never say it. If they did, what would he even say?

That they are more right and much, much more wrong than they would ever know?

Derry was never a comfort, especially not now, and all the sacrifice came from staying there, staying strong and steady in the eye of the storm, waiting for the next wave to come.

Mike can't keep clinging to those thoughts, he just goes back to work. He works, and works, and works on the farm until his dad finally puts a hand on his shoulder and tells him enough. It was springtime, his favorite time, and yet the ground still felt icy underneath him, there was a fog hanging heavily around his brain that made him unable to smile, even at the sight of first blooms behind the chicken coop.

His dad hires a guy who's new to town to take over his duties and Mike just silently thanks someone that his dad knows him better than he knows himself sometimes.

He gets a job at the library a week later.

Mike likes the library rather a lot, and he's actually surprised by that at first. Sure, he got good grades in school, but that was more a product of wanting to make his parents proud than any genuine interest in studies. The library was never somewhere he spent much time, he never spent much time in town at all without the rest of the losers and out of all of them Ben was the one who spent the most time there. Even he didn't spend that much time there once he had the others though.

But the library is calm, steady work. It eases his anxiety, pulls the weight off his shoulders for hours at a time and he smiles, much, much more than he had in those last 6 months around the farm.

The library is good for him.

He makes it into a safe, warm place full of love just like the farm had been.

He knows, even now in the late 90s, people in town are still scared of him. Knows it as he has from the first time his dad had sat him down and given him the talk, about the police, about the people in this town. But he knows, just as wholly and truly as he knows that, that once people know him they won't be scared.

Mike fights back with unyielding kindness, fights the hands clutching at purses with a polite nod and downturned gaze. He makes himself visible so he can never be accused of hiding in the shadows, wears warm, brightly colored sweaters and always smiles and greets people coming through the door.

Soon enough, the usuals start to know him, like him, stand up for him even when it's needed. The weary gazes fade, go away, turn friendly, and the library starts to feel like a place he can make his home.

He sees Ben in the lonely kids that come in day after day and sit alone, he tries to encourage them, be kind to them because they might need it. He sees Ben in those lonely kids and hopes and hopes that they won't ever see what Ben did, won't go through that. The thought alone gets him through weeks and months and years in Derry.

The sacrifice he's making is more worth it than ever in the light of a shy child's smile.

He still goes back to the farm though, stays in his upstairs bedroom, sleeps on the same double sized mattress he's had since he started high school. The scent of his mother's laundry detergent and fresh air still lull him to sleep like nothing else can.

The man his dad hired on the farm tries to kiss him one day. Mike lets him. He's nice enough, the same age as him, funny if maybe a bit dull in the few times Mike's interacted with him before that, but his hands are rough and greasy with sweat and oil from the tractor and

Mike, oddly enough, can't help but think of Eddie.

He must smile too hard, or laugh a little into the kiss because the guy just pulls away, looks at him kind of funny, and goes back to working on the tractor.

They don't mention it again, and by the next summer he's gone.

Back at the library he starts to research. He remembers almost everything Ben told them, and it's easy to retrace his steps, he finds articles, books, first hand accounts of everything, every twenty-seven year cycle. He starts keeping a journal of everything he can find out about each event and stories from everyone he talks to that can remember them.

Sometimes, he dips into the weirder corners of the library, books on the occult, magiks, rituals and things his sensible side tells him are too ridiculous to think about. Yet, over the years, his eyes keep straying towards the shelves.

There are a lot of days where Mike has to remind himself why he's doing what he's doing. Has to remind himself it's for the greater good, so no other kids have to die, to be terrorized. That he's doing the right thing, that he's strong, and good, and brave, and all the better for his sacrifice.

And all of that sounds false and dull when it's his own voice echoing into his own ears, so he's lucky that it's usually six other voices inside his head doing the talking.

One day something really great happens though.

They get a new shipment of books, bestsellers, and one among them is by William Denbrough.

When Bill's books start turning up he thinks he must be dreaming, but it's really him. It's really Big Bill, *Billy*, going by William Denbrough and looking up at him from the shiny back cover of a bestselling horror novel. He has a ponytail and Mike laughs and laughs, alone, in his new loft above the library. He's never been more glad that they all got out of Derry while they still could.

The thought of Bill, out there and doing great things makes him so happy he knows he must look ridiculous, sitting behind the front desk reading a terrifying book and smiling wider than most people had ever seen him smile.

It feels good to look ridiculous though.

The new librarian starts working on a Tuesday morning. Mike remembers walking in and seeing her trying to carry way more books than would be sustainable but he lets her try anyway. She drops one on her way across the back aisle and Mike picks it up. He remembers handing it to her and her eyes meeting his.

Her eyes are almond shaped and brown, covered by glasses that could have easily been Richie's, and a cloud of curly, unruly hair that could have easily belonged to Stan.

Mike can still remember the way his heart picked up, for more than one reason, upon seeing her for the first time.

For two years they are good together. She's smart, well-read, much more so than him which makes him a little self conscious since he's the one who's been locked up in a library for years. But she never makes him feel bad about it, she just gives him recommendations, scrunches up her nose at Bill's books, and teases that he must have a crush on him to be reading that junk. She makes him relax, makes him forget about his responsibilities and she sees him, well enough, as much as she can without knowing, without having been there. It's good and it's easy and she's nice, she's so so nice. Until she asks him to leave with her.

And he can't. He knows he can't and he knows he can't tell her why in any way that will make sense.

When he comes back to the farm, tears in his eyes, to curl up in his childhood bedroom his mother just smiles that sad smile at him, the one she's worn a lot more often since his father passed, pulls him in close, and he can smell the familiar scent of detergent and air.

He breathes in deep. He knows why he's doing what he's doing, he just wishes it didn't hurt so much sometimes.

He soldiers on alone.

And it may be because of the heartbreak, or it may be because of the clock in his mind, ticking down, down, down with every passing year, but he starts going back to that corner of the library. And he knows what he's doing is bad, and he knows it sounds crazy, but everything about this town, this situation, his whole life has been crazy! And this might just be crazy enough to work.

He visits the tribe, listens to them, makes a few bad decisions, and comes back to the library with a root and a stolen artifact.

The clock keeps on ticking.

The internet is a tricky thing. Mike likes to think of himself as being pretty with the times, and he certainly feels like he is when he teaches the local senior citizens' group how to make themselves an eMail. Still, he wasn't truly aware of all the internet could do until he started getting closer and closer to the twenty seven year mark. It was almost scary how easily he could access information on all of the other losers, not just the famous ones.

Eddie has a Facebook, Stan has a Twitter account, and Ben can easily be reached through the number on his LinkedIn page.

He tries not to, but it's so easy once he's there to dive, deep, into exactly what his friends had been doing for the last near three decades of their lives. He dives, and he drowns, drowns in the pictures and articles and interviews and guest appearances and book readings and stand-up specials.

He drowns in the warmth of his friends, living their lives in what seems like the best ways they can. Similarly, he drowns in the cold depths of research, police scanners, news reports.

In the end twenty-seven years doesn't seem nearly as long as it should to him. It's a cold hand that claws at his heart, telling him that soon he must be the one to drag them down with him.

When he shows up at the bridge, sees Don, sees the body, he knows it's time.

He picks up the phone, one... two, three, four-five- *six* times, he picks up the phone. He calls each of his friends, tries not to feel like he's making a huge mistake, and waits.

He's gotten really good at waiting.